

Supporting the mental health of furloughed workers during the coronavirus outbreak

As a result of the Coronavirus outbreak, surveys suggest [around half of UK companies](#) are planning to [furlough their employees](#). In response, the [City Mental Health Alliance](#) has compiled this guidance detailing tips and signposting to useful resources to support the mental health of furloughed employees.

Impact of being furloughed

People impacted by these arrangements will respond in different ways depending on their individual circumstances. Some may welcome the break from work to look after children and/or dependents, however, for many it will be a difficult time with different thoughts and emotions that might include:



Increased stress and uncertainty over the future, including worries about their financial position and the longer-term stability of their employer



Feeling undervalued or a lack of importance to the company. This may impact an individual's feelings of self-worth, damage their confidence and may lead to negative thoughts about their ability/competence to do their job



Losing a sense of purpose and value - this may be further impacted through a lack of structure day-to-day and having to spend most of the time at home



Feeling of loneliness and isolation through a lack of connection and communication with others, possible feelings of abandonment



Worries about losing access to company resources and benefits e.g. access to an EAP, medical insurance and pensions

Looking after the mental health of furloughed workers

Work can play a key role in maintaining and enhancing someone's positive mental health. An absence of work may mean existing mental health issues become worse, previous ones are triggered or new ones could start. How employers support and engage with their employees over the next few weeks, through this challenging experience, will not only impact on their mental health today, but on how well they are when they come back into the workplace. It will also impact on their relationship with and how they feel about their employers when they return to the workplace. To help:

Communicate clearly, regularly and with transparency



Be as honest and transparent as possible with people. Clearly communicate providing reassurance that the furlough is not caused by mismanagement of the company or underperformance of the employee. Provide clarity about the purpose of and length of the furlough scheme



Outline business priorities during the furlough period so employees on furlough and those who continue to work have clarity on the focus and don't feel left out



Pre-empt additional questions from employees with special circumstances such as those on maternity/paternity/parental leave; probation; have planned annual leave; or secondment during the furlough period

Signpost to employer and external support for mental health



Provide clarity as soon as possible around what provisions and benefits will remain in place during the furlough e.g. access to the company EAP and MHFAiders, and insurance coverage



Be aware of certain groups or individuals that may be more affected by being furloughed and may need extra support. For example, new employees, people who live on their own or those with an existing mental or physical health condition. Ask every individual about any concerns they have or extra support they feel they may need



Provide managers/leaders with the skills/guidance to have potentially challenging and emotional conversations with furloughed workers. Ensure that managers/leaders and employees are aware of support and resources available to them

Help employees to stay connected with the company and each other



Encourage regular check-ins with furloughed workers to provide updates and to ask how they are coping, and if there is anything they need support with. Simple questions such as “Are you okay?” and giving someone space to talk can be helpful. Be clear about what lines of communication are open if they want to connect or have any questions



Hold informal sessions to bring people together over platforms such as Microsoft Teams, and Zoom, to facilitate social connection. Encourage those still working to maintain regular contact with furloughed workers, wherever possible

Tips to encourage furloughed workers to stay mentally healthy

Think about what opportunities can be provided to employees to align them to the [5 Ways to Wellbeing](#) (Give, Keep Active, Take Notice, Connect and Learn):

Give

- Signpost people to alternative activities like [volunteering](#).

Take notice

- During check-ins take notice of how your colleagues are feeling or acting and sign post them to support if needed
- Encourage people to notice how they are feeling. [This mood self-assessment](#) from the NHS can help people check-in with how they have been feeling over the last two weeks

Learn

- Encourage people to look for potential opportunities to do something different during this time. For example, taking up free or discounted learning or training being offered during the coronavirus outbreak, tackling tasks around the house, starting a new hobby or spending quality time with family

Connect

- Empower people to take the lead on setting up initiatives for their teams such as online workouts, book clubs, making or sharing music, language lessons and quizzes
- Consider offering furloughed employees the opportunity to have a buddy during this time. Connect people to each other to maintain relationships and check-in with each other on a regular basis



Dr Emma Mahoney,
Chartered Clinical Psychologist

"The Covid-19 outbreak has led to fundamental changes in the way that we live and work. Whilst these can lead to new creativity, time with family and for reflection, their impact on employers and employees can also lead to new levels of anxiety and uncertainty for many people. In particular, furloughing can lead to staff managing a wide range of new issues: social isolation; loss of confidence and self-worth; anxiety about the security of their job and finances; and feeling undervalued. At this time, it is crucial for employers to consider and support the mental health needs of their workforce to reduce the risk of new mental health problems emerging and the exacerbation of existing mental health difficulties. In so doing, they will give their furloughed employees the best opportunity to recover, return and start to rebuild"

Useful resources

Advice for employers

- **Gov.uk:** COVID-19: guidance for employees: [View resource](#)
- **Linklaters:** Covid-19: The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and furloughing your workforce: [View resource](#)

Resources to promote good mental health

- **World Health Organisation:** Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak: [View resource](#)
- **World Health Organisation:** coping with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak: [View resource](#)
- **Public Health England:** Guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus (COVID-19): [View resource](#)
- **Mind:** Coronavirus and your wellbeing: [View resource](#)
- **Mental Health Foundation:** looking after your mental health during the Coronavirus outbreak: [View resource](#)
- **NHS:** 5 steps to mental wellbeing. [View resource](#)

Information on volunteering opportunities

- **The Guardian:** Coronavirus and volunteering: how can I help in the UK?: [View resource](#)
- **NHS:** Volunteer Responders: [View resource](#)
- **DoIT:** Coronavirus responders: [View resource](#)
- **NCVO:** Volunteer centre finder: [View resource](#)

Information on free services available during the coronavirus outbreak

- **Salesforce:** Sanity Savers: [View resource](#)
- **Free online Ivy League courses:** [View resource](#)

Support

- **CMHA:** Help and advice lines: [View resource](#)
- **CMHA:** coronavirus resources: [View resource](#)

Contact

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